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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9839
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RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 2284
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO PRIORITY 0356
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA PRIORITY 2022
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PORT AU PRINCE 000399

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/09/2019
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [ASEC](#) [HA](#)
SUBJECT: HAITI: LUKEWARM INTEREST IN SENATE ELECTION
CAMPAIGN

REF: A. PORT AU PRINCE 378
[1](#)B. PORT AU PRINCE 177

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Thomas C. Tighe for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Campaigning is relatively low-key as Haiti moves toward the first round of partial Senate elections April 19. Although campaign posters and radio commercials have begun to appear, most parties -- with the exception of the ruling Lespwa coalition -- seem to lack the financing to promote their candidates. Several minor incidents have marred the campaign. Electoral offices in Les Cayes and the house of a senior electoral official in the Artibonite were set ablaze by unknown perpetrators, and armed men menaced an identity card distribution office in Port-de-Paix. UN peacekeepers will maintain a state of heightened alert through election day, partly in response to concerns that militants of the Fanmi Lavalas party will protest their exclusion by disrupting the voting in certain localities. Despite delays, electoral officials and international observers believe the first round of voting will take place as scheduled. End summary.

ELECTORAL PREPARATIONS CONTINUE

[1](#)2. (SBU) The first four weeks of the official campaign for 12 vacant Senate seats has seen lukewarm campaign activity and low voter interest. Technical preparations for the balloting continue, as do concerns that many new voters will not receive their ID cards and that polling places will not receive their voter lists and ballots (ref A). Political parties have been slow to mobilize in support of their candidates. Most attribute the paucity of visible campaign activity to the parties' lack of money, and the failure to activate the legal mechanism for state financing of campaigns. Although the Electoral Law requires the Ministry of Finance to distribute funds to the parties based on the number of registered candidates the party is fielding, neither the Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) nor the Ministry of Finance has announced when or whether a subsidy will be granted. Many Lespwa candidates are mounting a relatively vigorous campaign despite the delays, a development the coalition's detractors consider proof that allies of President Rene Preval are finding underhanded ways to use state resources to finance their favored candidates. Senator Cemephise Gilles (Lespwa, North) denied these

allegations, telling the press that Lespwa was benefiting from strong private sector donations and was not misusing public resources.

13. (SBU) The CEP has given Lespwa candidates another advantage by putting them on the top of the ballot in each department. The CEP assigned every party a number. That number is listed on the ballot beside the name of every candidate of that party. Although meant as an aid for Haiti's numerous illiterate voters, this number also determines the rank order of candidates on the ballot. The CEP assigned Lespwa the number one, putting Lespwa candidates on the top of every ballot.

14. (SBU) Perhaps sensing this political wind, several would-be Fanmi Lavalas (FL) candidates have defected to Lespwa. Former FL Senator Franky Exius, whom FL rejected as candidate in the South Department, then sought to run under the Lespwa banner and was accepted. Lespwa's candidate in the West Department, which includes Port-au-Prince, is a former Lavalas organizer in Cite Soleil, Joseph Joel John. Moise Jean Charles is another former FL militant, now running under the Lespwa banner in the North Department.

15. (C) Most observers are predicting meager voter turnout in the April 19 elections. Modest voter education efforts, new polling station locations, and delays in distributing the identification cards required on election day may all contribute to low participation. The private National Center for the Observation of Elections (CNO) has criticized the CEP for missing legal deadlines for the publication of

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election-related information and the hiring of polling station personnel. Senate President Kely Bastien told the Ambassador April 6 that low voter interest will likely keep voter turnout below ten percent, and MINUSTAH security officials privately estimate voter participation in the first round will be seven percent. The National Identification Office (ONI) director announced April 7 that only 220,000 of 620,000 recently printed identification cards have been distributed to their owners; poor infrastructure and the lack of a functioning postal system have hampered distribution efforts to date. On April 8, a CEP spokesman announced that lists of eligible voters by commune are now available and unveiled a website where voters can find their polling place by entering their 9al and Communal Electoral Offices the morning of April 5. The residence of the head of the Artibonite's Departmental Electoral Office (BED) was set aflame the same weekend; the victim accused other members of Artibonite's BED of being responsible for the attack. In the North, local radio reported April 8 that armed men had threatened the ONI office in Port-de-Paix, but police subsequently secured the scene. Some candidates and political parties have also cried foul, claiming harassment by rivals. The Fusion party leadership, for instance, denounced partisans of the Lespwa coalition and the UCADDE party for 'interfering' with - and in one case physically beating - its candidates, especially in the Grand'Anse and Center departments.

MINUSTAH PREPARES FOR ELECTION DAY

17. (C) Given the relative strength of Fanmi Lavalas in the North Department - where that party's would-be candidate, Nawoom Marcellus, has many supporters and a history of violence - UN peacekeepers plan to strengthen their presence in that region in advance of election day. The Haitian National Police (HNP) will bear primary responsibility for the security of polling places but MINUSTAH will augment its presence in Port-au-Prince and Cap Haitien in advance of April 19. According to a DAO source, MINUSTAH plans to send a platoon of soldiers to Cap Haitien to serve as a reaction force in case one is needed. Local Lavalas leadership has remained relatively quiet during the campaign period, despite

their earlier pledge to mount an organized series of demonstrations to protest their exclusion from the elections (ref B). Lavalas Senator Rudy Heriveaux has continued calls for his supporters to participate in ''Operation Closed Doors'' and boycott the elections, but he enjoys little grassroots support. Aging militant Annette Auguste, widely known as ''So Ann,'' told Canadian Embassy officers April 6 that Lavalas popular organizations would use ''any nonviolent means'' to disrupt the elections, a statement a Canadian Embassy political officer construed to include civil disobedience and other efforts to prevent voters from casting their ballots. The HNP expects only isolated disturbances on election day, but plans to secure each individual polling place with uniformed officers to deter trouble. Senate President Kely Bastien told the Ambassador there was the possibility of FL-instigated violence in the North, Center, West and Nippes Departments. MINUSTAH officials in Les Cayes told PolCouns March 26 that Guy Philippe supporters would not be able to disrupt election proceedings very far beyond his stronghold town of Pestel.

COMMENT

18. (C) This election will not be perfect. There may be some violence by supporters of the excluded Fanmi Lavalas party,

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by partisans of Guy Philippe, or others. There will be some confusion as to where voters are supposed to vote. Many new voters may not have their new ID cards in time for the election. These factors, combined with low interest in this partial Senatorial election, will likely result in low voter turnout. However, the CEP and especially MINUSTAH are pulling out all the stops, both in terms of logistics and security.

TIGHE